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Use proper sources

Church News Viewpoint

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A woman sat at her dining room table, buried in dozens of books and magazines. She looked discouraged. Her daughter asked if she could help.

The woman said she was preparing a Relief Society lesson. She told her daughter she didn't know how she could possibly "boil down all the information" she had collected for the lesson. The process, the woman acknowledged, was both time consuming and frustrating.

The daughter looked surprised.

"Why," she asked, "are you trying to boil down information? An inspired Church-writing committee has already done that for you."

The committee's work, the daughter continued, has been approved by the Quorum of the Twelve and the First Presidency. It has been translated into dozens of languages and sent around the world. It corresponds with the lessons and information taught at the same time to other auxiliaries and quorums in the Church.

Now the woman looked confused.

"Everything you need — and more — is in your manual," the daughter said.

As Church members, we are asked to prayerfully prepare Church lessons and activities. We are to seek personal revelation from the Lord and study Church materials and instructions. We can counsel with our presidencies or committees and seek advice from priesthood leaders as we strive to meet the needs of those we serve. The scriptures are an invaluable resource.

But we may be tempted to do more, to turn to unofficial lesson plans, resources and information found in books and on the Internet.

Sometimes, the material might seem like an easy solution to meet the time-consuming demands of Church service. Other times it might feel like a way to spice up a lesson or activity.

But leaders and teachers in the Church do themselves and the people they serve a disservice when they turn to unofficial — not correlated — materials in the planning of lessons and activities.

Correlation is an inspired effort overseen by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve to simplify the programs of the Church and unify Latter-day Saints in faith and doctrine.

Since the early 1960s, Church members have seen the results of more than four decades of correlation efforts, established to:

Maintain purity of doctrine.

Emphasize the importance of the family and the home.

Place all the work of the Church under priesthood direction.

Establish proper relationships among the organizations of the Church.

Achieve unity and order in the Church.

Ensure simplicity of Church programs and materials.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve said that correlation is a process “in which we take all the programs of the Church, bring them to one focal point, wrap them in one package, operate them as one program, involve all members of the Church in the operation — and do it all under priesthood direction” (“Lesson 42: Continuing Revelation to Latter-day Prophets,” Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual, 243).

Today, the correlation process helps ensure that materials published in the name of the Church — carrying the Church logo — are scripture-based, doctrinally accurate and appropriate for the intended audience. All Church publications are planned, prepared, reviewed and implemented under the direction of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve.

Following the advice of her daughter, the woman above turned off her computer, shut the dozens of books open on her dining room table and picked up her manual and scriptures. The frustration she had previously experienced disappeared. She knew the material was doctrinally accurate. She knew its source was valid. She knew it had been approved by the men called to lead the Lord's work on the earth today and that it was what they wanted her to teach.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks said in his October 1999 general conference address that as he traveled the Church he had been pleased and impressed with how Relief Society and priesthood lessons were presented and received.

"However," he added, "I have sometimes observed teachers who gave the designated chapter no more than a casual mention and then presented a lesson and invited discussion on other materials of the teacher's choice. That is not acceptable.

"A gospel teacher is not called to choose the subject of the lesson but to teach and discuss what has been specified. Gospel teachers should also be scrupulous to avoid hobby topics, personal speculations, and controversial subjects. The Lord's revelations and the directions of His servants are clear on this point."

Elder Oaks asked Church members to be mindful of President Spencer W. Kimball's great instruction that a teacher in the Church is a "guest."

Quoting President Kimball, Elder Oaks said a gospel teacher "has been given an authoritative position and a stamp of approval is placed upon him, and those whom he teaches are justified in assuming that, having been chosen and sustained in the proper order, he represents the Church and the things which he teaches are approved by the Church. No matter how brilliant he may be and how many new truths he may think he has found, he has no right to go beyond the program of the Church'" (Elder Dallin H. Oaks, "Gospel Teaching," Ensign, November 1999, 78).

President Thomas S. Monson said there is peace that comes from teaching with the spirit of obedience.

"As we teach others, may we follow the example of the perfect teacher, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," he said. "He left His footprints in the sands of the seashore but left His teaching principles in the hearts and in the lives of all whom He taught." (Thomas S. Monson, "Examples of Great Teachers," Ensign, June 2007.)

The Church — through its inspired correlation program — has given us official sources of information to help us prepare lessons and plan activities. Instead of turning to unofficial books and Web sites, let's use those sources.